

MINUTES OF MEETING
CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION
MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE
MONDAY, JULY 19, 2021 – 1:00 p.m.
CITY CENTER COUNCIL CHAMBERS

PRESENT: Bill Leder, Michele Jarvie-Eggart, Kristine Bradof, Jennifer Julien

Also present: Clerk Ann Vollrath, Sharon Levine, Derek Bradway, Craig Waddell, and Garrett Neese.

OPPORTUNITY
FOR PUBLIC
TO ADDRESS:

No one addressed the Committee.

APPROVAL OF
PREVIOUS
MINUTES:

Bill Leder made a correction on Page 1 the last bullet will state “Houghton Housing Commission”. On Page 2 the last bullet will state “Install rapid rectangular beacons”. A motion was made by Julien and seconded by Bradof to approve the minutes of the May 3, 2021 meeting as corrected.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

BUSINESS:

Bill Leder reported the parking deck committee met recently and after reviewing their evaluation matrix the committee decided to recommend to the planning commission that it recommend to the council to proceed with removing the parking deck entirely and to proceed with what comes next.

They recognized issues with safety and the ongoing cost to maintain the present deck. The city is now watching the deck with increased diligence.

Jen Julien said she attended master plan training where it was mentioned that sub-area plans allow flexibility for updating areas in the master plan without updating entire chapters.

Kristine Bradof said the commission can then amend the zoning ordinance for the sub-area.

Jen Julien also said the commission can consider breaking the downtown into separate sub-areas.

The committee agreed that a sub-area plan may result in form-based zoning downtown so that new construction fits in and preserves the historic integrity of downtown.

Craig Waddell addressed the committee. He brought books discussing aging in place and other topics the commission is discussing to share with the members. He said there is rich geographical history in Houghton that could be expanded upon for tourism.

The committee discussed future housing possibilities in Houghton. Bill Leder read a memo from City Manager Eric Waara:

- *There are limited opportunities for large-scale housing growth downtown, but there are still opportunities in the mixed-use buildings. Much of what follows is more city-wide.*
- *We are in unique times. Housing demand in our area is high, which means the prices increase because of supply and demand. We have one of those desirable communities in which to live. If the supply does not increase then the principles of economics dictate that prices will. This will work against any efforts on the affordable housing front.*
- *Material prices remain high. This means new single-family housing starts are actually lower (in Houghton) than one would think. Many people who planned to build this year are waiting until material prices decrease. Developers have said that the only sure return is on multifamily because material prices have put spec homes out of the price range of the spec market, but multifamily, done right, is still able to make a return.*
- *Any new housing starts, be they single-family, “condos”, student housing, or what have you; increase the housing stock. That supply will be filled by new people relocating to Houghton from away, others in the local area moving into town, others in town bettering their residence, and so on. The big thing is supply. We need the supply to meet that demand. I dare say any new housing starts of any type will beget more mobility in housing, though some parts of the spectrum create more mobility opportunities than others. For example: someone builds what everyone calls “condos”. Some of them will be purchased by out-of-towners; those being anyone from Chicago or South Range. Some will be purchased by people who live in the City already. Those already-Houghton residents put their house on the market. Someone buys that house, they could be from away or they could be another family in town who wants to upgrade. Maybe that other Houghton house is bought by someone coming from an apartment, and so on. Student-centric builds would have a similar result. As the new student apartments wick in residents from the rental houses, others will also come in from the outlying areas to fill some of those apartments, but there are eventually going to be some of those houses that aren’t going to get rented. Maybe some of them are sold as a single-family residence.*
- *I have brought up the subject of more senior housing with the Housing Commission Director. They are pondering that. We could use more.*
- *Some of this sounds like a “trickle-down” approach, a philosophy which has been debated for decades. I recognize that. However, we are somewhat at the mercy of what developers want to build; those housing types that meet the investment goals. That’s why so much of the housing to date has been student-centric; it is in demand. Our Housing Authority only has so much capacity and resources to work with. The City itself isn’t of a size that it could put together a transformative housing program because we simply do not have the means.*

- *To restate what I have said at previous meetings; we are going to need to be more proactive with development and redevelopment, especially when it comes to housing. We need to keep our minds open to new ideas and new possibilities if we are to increase housing opportunities in Houghton and grow as a community.*

Kristine Bradof said there is a demand for more housing for seniors. Not everyone wants to move into an apartment. The city is missing this area of housing that includes townhouses and smaller homes. The trend is away from large-lot single-family homes. She suggested combining the R-1 and R-2 districts, putting parameters on a lot so that it fits into the neighborhood but allow more than one dwelling unit. She feels there are ways to make better use of land without changing the character of neighborhoods.

Michele Jarvie-Eggart said she would like to see more options for aging in place. Many elders do not have children living in the community. Perhaps the ordinance can be changed to allow more unrelated people living in one house as many of the homes are very large and the elderly can rent out rooms to more than one student who can also help the elderly resident with chores.

Bill Leder said there are two areas in the proposed ordinance regarding housing that he asked the committee members to review prior to next week's public hearing. One proposed change is to allow owner-occupied short-term rentals. The other proposed change is to allow hire density in R-3 and R-4 districts with architectural guidelines.

Michele Jarvie-Eggart met with Carol MacLennan to identify locations where mines existed or locations where significant mining refuse exists. They would like the City to document what the closure requirements were for these properties, and inform developers where the mining sites are located.

Derek Bradway discussed the expansion of the R-4 district with the committee members. He said he feels the reduced parking requirements in R-4 should be looked at again as he feels they are unsafe and unwise. He said in his experience approximately 90% of his tenants have vehicles. If there is not enough parking provided, the city will struggle with people parking where they should not park. Also, neighboring properties will struggle with people parking on their property that do not belong.

Kristine Bradof said the city should look for other options for parking.

Derek Bradway said the city should have other options in place before expanding the R-4 district.

A suggestion was made for the commission to hold a meeting with developers to discuss why the present R-4 district is not working well.

The next meeting of the committee will be scheduled at a later date.

A motion to adjourn was made by Julien and seconded by Leder.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Kristine Bradof, Secretary